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The situation in Afghanistan

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The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 67/16 and Security Council resolution 2096 (2013), in which the Council requested me to report on developments in Afghanistan every three months.

2. The report provides an update on the activities of the United Nations in Afghanistan, including significant humanitarian, development and human rights efforts, since my previous report of 13 June 2013 (A/67/889-S/2013/350). It also provides a summary of key political and security developments and regional and international events relating to Afghanistan.

II. Relevant developments

A. Political developments

3. The reporting period saw significant positive momentum in preparation for the 2014 elections, even as steps towards a peace process faced difficulties. My Deputy, Jan Eliasson, visited Kabul and Kandahar from 28 June to 2 July 2013, where he engaged with Government, political stakeholders and civil society, including women's rights activists. On 3 July, one year after agreement on the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework (see A/66/867-S/2012/532, annex II), a Senior Officials Meeting in Kabul brought together representatives of the international community and the Government of Afghanistan to assess the status of commitments and further focus efforts moving forward. With transition processes to culminate next year, the situation remained characterized by uncertainty, but efforts have generally proceeded as planned.

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4. On 18 June, representatives of the Taliban and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Qatar announced the opening of the Political Office of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan in Doha. A press release by the Taliban stated that the Office would "support a political solution" for Afghanistan's future and that the movement would not allow "Afghan territory to threaten other countries' security". However, the Taliban's use of the name and symbols of its former regime during the ceremony triggered a strongly negative reaction by the Government of Afghanistan and wider society. The Government has long insisted that any office be an address for authorized Taliban representatives to talk with the High Peace Council and not imply or legitimize a government in exile. There was further consternation at the Taliban statement's emphasis on establishing relations with third countries and international organizations, noting dialogue with Afghan authorities only at an unspecified, later date. On 19 June, the Government declared that dialogue would be postponed pending guarantees that the process would be fully Afghan-led. On 24 June, the National Security Council was informed that the contested signboard and flag had been removed by officials in Doha. The Taliban subsequently announced that the Office would temporarily close. Its future remains uncertain, with a spokesperson for Afghanistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs stating, on 12 August, that the Government was ready to establish dialogue with Taliban representatives in either Saudi Arabia or Turkey.

5. The joint secretariat of the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Programme reported that, as at 24 August, 7,220 former insurgents had joined the Programme, with 160 line ministry projects and 164 small grants completed or in progress. Separately, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) continued to support the Afghan People's Dialogue on Peace. Between April and June, 100 focus group discussions — of 200 planned in total — were conducted across the country involving 1,733 Afghans, including 429 women. The second phase of the initiative aims to develop provincial road maps for peace, drawing on the recommendations of participants. Entrenched impunity, pervasive corruption and abuse of authority, unemployment and, in some cases, lack of equitable development were highlighted as reasons for discontent and the insurgency. Concerns were voiced about the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Programme and what was seen as a lack of vetting and accountability.

6. In response to events in Doha, on 19 June President Hâmid Karzai suspended high-level negotiations on the Bilateral Security Agreement with the United States of America. A number of Afghan political stakeholders, including parliamentary and opposition leaders, opposed the decision, arguing that it could lead to the international community's withdrawing entirely at this critical juncture. On 14 July, the President's spokesperson confirmed plans to hold a national jirga to consult on the Agreement. The Cooperation Council of Political Parties and Coalitions of Afghanistan has rejected such a jirga, should it purport to have any legal authority, as unconstitutional and politically divisive. Concern has been expressed that the gathering could be turned to other purposes, including seeking to delay the 2014 elections or change the Constitution. On 22 July, while visiting Kabul, the United States Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin Dempsey, urged that the stalled Agreement be finalized by October. On 21 August, Afghanistan's National Security Adviser and head of the Security Transition Commission was named, together with the Foreign Minister, to lead a new phase in strategic engagement on this issue. On 24 August, President Karzai stated that if the current Government

could not reach agreement with the United States, then the latter would have to negotiate with the future Government.

7. Key legislation was agreed ahead of the 2014 presidential and provincial council elections. The Law on the Structure and Duties of the Independent Election Commission and the Independent Electoral Complaints Commission (the "structure law") and the electoral law were endorsed by President Karzai on 17 and 20 July, respectively, immediately after they were passed by the National Assembly. The new laws retained the Independent Electoral Complaints Commission and made it a permanent body for adjudicating electoral disputes. The single non-transferable voting system, with all candidates for representative bodies standing as individuals in multi-member provincial contests, was also maintained. After heated debate, the 10-seat quota for the nomadic Kuchi community was kept, although there will now be seven regional zones rather than a national constituency. Reserved seats for women representatives were reduced, with Provincial Councils now having a 20 per cent quota — down from 25 per cent.

8. The consultative process for appointing commissioners to the two electoral management bodies set forth in the new structure law was swiftly implemented. On 28 July, the selection committee, composed of the Chairpersons of the two houses of the National Assembly, the heads of the Independent Commission for Oversight of the Implementation of the Constitution and the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, together with the Chief Justice, presented the President with a shortlist of 27 nominees, drawn from over 200 applicants. Regrettably, civil society organizations related to elections failed to come to agreement and had no official representative in the selection process for the Independent Election Commission, as required by the new law. On 30 July, the President announced his final nine choices, who were sworn in the following day. The new members are broadly representative of Afghanistan's regional and ethnic diversity; three of the nine are women and two of the men have previously served as Commissioners. On 3 August, the new appointees elected Ahmad Yusuf Nuristani, a former governor of Herat, as Chair and, on 5 August, the President endorsed the reappointment of the Chief Electoral Officer. On 24 August, the process for selection of the Independent Electoral Complaints Commission got under way.

9. Technical preparations for the election have proceeded as planned. On 27 July, the second phase of the voter registration top-up exercise commenced at the district level. Limited to newly eligible or returned voters, as of 21 August, 435,775 new voters' cards were issued, 96,924 of which were to women. There have not been significant security incidents directly related to the process to date, but four districts proved inaccessible for security reasons, while centres in five other districts have yet to open amid logistical and staffing issues. The issuance of electronic national identity cards, which can also be used as a form of voter identification, is on hold pending passage of the Law on Registration and Population Records. On 31 July, the Commission approved its operational plan for the 2014 elections and, on 27 August, endorsed the United Nations electoral support project, ELECT II (Enhancing Legal and Electoral Capacity for Tomorrow, second phase). Negotiations are ongoing between the Commission and the Ministry of Finance to ensure that a greater proportion of the US$ 129 million election financing is delivered through national budget processes.

10. Security for the conduct of elections is a major source of concern. On 29 July, the Ministry of the Interior provided the Independent Election Commission with its initial security threat assessment, estimating that 6,586 of 6,845 polling centres proposed by the Commission could be secured (3,435 assessed as secure, 945 low-threat, 1,074 medium-threat, 1,132 high-threat). Given child protection concerns, the Chief Electoral Officer agreed to discuss with Afghan security agencies the inclusion of a school impact assessment within the ongoing security assessment of potential polling stations. On 13 August, the former Chair of the Election Commission, Fazel Ahmad Manawi, stated in the media his belief that security officials were being unrealistic and had exaggerated preparedness for elections. The following day, the new Chair, Ahmad Yusuf Nuristani, responded that there were many challenges, but he believed that security forces were capable of addressing them.

11. Political activity among Afghan stakeholders gained pace ahead of the candidate nomination period, which runs from 16 September to 6 October. Intra- and inter-party alliances remain fluid, with multiple overlapping efforts to build broad-based alliances. Jamiat-e Islami, a predominantly Tajik party, appeared to put aside plans for a party Congress, with a 30 June internal reshuffle in which the interim party head, Salahuddin Rabbani, was retitled acting party head, and the Governor of Balkh, Atta Mohammad Noor, named Chief Executive. On 16 August, spokespersons for the historically, mainly Pashtun Hezb-e Islami (Afghanistan) and predominantly Hazara Hezb-e Wahdat faction led by Vice-President Karim Khalili told the media that an electoral alliance was planned. The Cooperation Council of Political Parties and Coalitions of Afghanistan continued to emphasize the necessity of timely elections. In the predominantly Pashtun South, there have been, however, a number of gatherings demanding the postponement or replacement of elections with other solutions or mechanisms owing to the security situation. On 1 August, the Governor of Kandahar was reported to have said that, given military drawdown in 2014, it was not the right time for elections and the President's term should instead be extended. The Taliban, in a statement purportedly by Taliban leader Mullah Omar to mark Eid al-Fitr, derided the upcoming polls as a "waste of time", highlighting allegations of fraud and corruption in previous elections. Reportedly, the Taliban plan a campaign to discourage election participation.

12. On 22 July, in the lower house of the National Assembly, or Wolesi Jirga, the Minister of the Interior, Ghulam Mujtaba Patang, lost a vote of interpellation after a majority of members rejected his answers to questions on the security situation. President Karzai has since sought an opinion from the Supreme Court on the legal basis of the vote and has named Mr. Patang as Acting Minister.

13. There were a number of changes to provincial governors. On 1 July, Kunar's Governor was transferred to Herat Province, which has been the site of intense rivalry between local powerbrokers. The same day, Farah's provincial governor was appointed Acting Minister of Tribal and Border Affairs. In Takhar Province, tensions between Uzbek and Tajik factions saw large-scale protests triggering the 15 July replacement of the provincial governor. That was seen to revive alliances between the predominantly Uzbek Junbesh-e Milli and Hezb-e Islami (Afghanistan) parties, at the expense of Jamiat-e Islami. In Jawzjan Province, ongoing intra-party tensions in Junbesh-e Milli saw protests and the 20 July replacement of the Governor.

B. Security developments

14. While overshadowed by events in Doha, the final tranche of the transfer of security responsibilities to Afghan security forces was announced on 18 June. A milestone event, this signified Afghan institutions' assumption of full responsibility for security of the country over the summer. On the occasion, President Karzai appealed to the international community "to equip Afghan forces according to the region's realities and according to existing security threats". The Commander of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), General Joseph Dunford, publicly emphasized that a post-2014 support presence would be essential to the sustainability of efforts.

15. As at 29 July, there were approximately 183,000 Afghan National Army personnel (against a goal of 187,000 personnel) and 6,700 Afghan Air Force personnel (with a target of 8,000). Of these, some 630 are female, including one general and about 100 working with the Special Forces to address gender sensitivities during night raid operations. The United Nations-administered Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan supported 139,631 police as of June, against a target of 157,000. Of these, 1,974 are women. Efforts to continue strengthening the capabilities of Afghan security forces continue, although there remains a notable shortage of logistical capacity, air support and medevac, as well as of assets to counter improvised explosive devices.

16. With Afghan security forces conducting most operations, the number of casualties they endure has risen considerably. During the second quarter of 2013, over 3,500 Afghan service personnel were reportedly wounded or killed in action. On 1 July, the Ministry of the Interior reported that 299 police officers were killed in the Afghan month of Jawza (mid-May to mid-June), a 22 per cent increase over the same period in 2012. Large-scale unauthorized absences, in the army in particular, remain an issue. Attrition, from all causes, is as high as 2.4 per cent per month. "Insider attacks" also continued. Between 16 May and 15 August, there were two incidents against the international military — in Kandahar and Paktika Provinces — for which the Taliban took responsibility, and five attacks involving Afghan forces in Herat, Helmand and Kunar.

17. In the context of reshaping the Afghan National Police from a security force to a law enforcement and community policing service, on 25 June the Minister of the Interior convened Afghanistan's first Community Policing Conference to discuss how to strengthen the relationship between the police and the community. A new Justice and Rule of Law Trust Fund for Afghanistan is planned for early 2014. The Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan will be housed under the fund to support an integrated justice and rule of law approach.

18. Separately, the expansion of the Afghan Local Police programme continued. As at 14 August, the total number of personnel stood at 23,550. Initially focused on the north and north-east of the country, the major expansion is now in the south-east, with Nimroz, Panjshir, Samangan and Nuristan the only provinces without the programme. The Afghan Local Police has borne an increasingly disproportionate brunt of attacks by anti-Government elements. At the same time, in spite of continued efforts, there continues to be concern at a lack of vetting and accountability mechanisms, with reports of serious abuses and intimidation levelled against the Afghan Local Police.

19. The United Nations continued to monitor security-related incidents relevant to the work, mobility and safety of civilian actors, particularly those events that affect the delivery of activities and programmes mandated by the United Nations. No respite was evident during the holy month of Ramadan. From 16 May to 15 August, 5,922 incidents were recorded, an 11 per cent increase compared with the same period in 2012 (5,317 incidents), while still a 21 per cent decrease from 2011 (7,482 incidents). Tactically, armed clashes and improvised explosive devices constituted the majority of events (4,534 of the total). There has also been an insurgent focus on attacking security checkpoints and bases handed over to Afghan forces by the international military. Generally effective resistance by Afghan security forces focused on protecting key urban and district administrative centres as well as strategic transport routes.

20. Geographically, the southern, south-eastern and eastern provinces continued to account for the bulk of the security incidents — 69 per cent between 16 May and 15 August. Sangin district in Helmand Province remained one of the most contested areas in the country. The Wardoj district of Badakhshan Province remained fragile following armed clashes earlier in the year. On 28 June, foreign elements were reportedly involved and directly engaged in a clash between anti-Government elements and the Afghanistan National Border Police. Road transport in the district has been impacted, reducing access to four border districts. Across the North, the Al-Qaida-linked Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan is reported to have developed a field presence in several provinces.

21. Anti-Government elements conducted a number of "spectacular" attacks in urban areas. Between 16 May and 15 August, there were 33 suicide incidents, of which 7 occurred in the heavily protected capital, compared to 7 for all of 2012 and 16 in 2011. On 2 July, a truck bomb, aimed at a logistics base contracted by the international military near the largest United Nations facility in Afghanistan, killed six people and is believed to have used the largest explosive charge to date in Kabul. On 3 August, in Jalalabad, the Consulate of India was the subject of a complex suicide attack, in which all casualties were Afghan security personnel and civilians.

22. The United Nations, its implementing partners and other humanitarian entities came under a variety of direct and collateral attacks. On 22 June, in Farah City, a homemade improvised explosive device targeted a United Nations compound, although no casualties or damage were reported. On 1 August, a UNAMA vehicle travelling to Taloqan (Takhar Province) came under small arms fire as it evaded an illegal checkpoint. The United Nations was made aware of specific threats against agencies in Kunduz, Herat, Gardez, Khost, Jalalabad and Kabul, with staff temporarily withdrawn from premises in several cases.

C. Regional cooperation

23. New Governments in the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan presented opportunities for Afghanistan to build on and consolidate relationships with those neighbours. On 26 and 27 August, President Karzai undertook an official visit to Islamabad, emphasizing that for both countries the "primary concern" was lack of security and the menace of terrorism. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif stated Pakistan's "strong and sincere support for peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan" and emphasized a policy of cooperative relations with all neighbours as vital to stable

external relations and a focus on domestic priorities. A number of economic and connectivity projects were also agreed.

24. On 4 August, President Karzai attended the inauguration in Tehran of Hassan Rouhani as President of the Islamic Republic of Iran. During the visit, a memorandum of understanding on strategic cooperation between the National Security Council of Afghanistan and the Supreme National Security Council of the Islamic Republic of Iran was signed. Areas of mutual interest include intelligence sharing in combating security threats such as terrorism, narcotics and organized crime. On 1 August, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan and the United Arab Emirates signed a long-term strategic partnership agreement and agreements on security cooperation and the transfer of prisoners.

25. On 7 July, Afghanistan became the fifty-fourth member of the Energy Charter Treaty. On 9 July, progress was made on the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline project with a contract signed in Ashgabat between Afghanistan and Turkmenistan on the sale and purchase of gas. On 13 July, in Kyrgyzstan, a meeting of the Foreign Ministers' Council of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization reaffirmed support to Afghanistan as an "independent, peaceful, neutral and prosperous State free from terrorism and drug-related crime". The central role of the United Nations in international efforts to improve the situation in Afghanistan was also reiterated. Under the Istanbul Process, regional technical groups on all six agreed confidence-building measures held meetings. The political value of regional experts and diplomats coming together to discuss these issues in six countries is in itself a significant achievement.

26. At the invitation of the Government of Pakistan, I visited Islamabad from 12 to 14 August and met with the President, Prime Minister and senior officials. I expressed appreciation for the ongoing hospitality that Pakistan has extended to Afghan refugees and was assured by the new administration of its intention to cooperate with Afghanistan. My Special Representative accompanied me on this visit and also represented me at President Rouhani's inauguration in Tehran, where, in a series of bilateral meetings, members of the new Iranian administration emphasized a desire for constructive engagement with the international community on issues of mutual interest, including Afghanistan. My Special Representative undertook a number of other regional visits as part of the UNAMA mandate of regional outreach, including to Moscow, Beijing, New Delhi and Dushanbe. In all capitals, enhanced commitment to bilateral and regional engagement in support of Afghan-led processes of elections and peace and reconciliation, as well as development and economic issues, was underscored. The interconnected nature of the challenges was recognized, with considerations for post-2014 Afghanistan focused on the need for a successful transfer of political authority through elections and peace and reconciliation efforts, amid fears of the impact of the increasing mobility of extremist groups, the readiness of national security forces, and rising narcotics production and trafficking.

III. Human rights

27. On 15 June, President Karzai appointed five new members of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, while four commissioners were retained on the nine-person body, including the Chair, Sima Simar. The Chair, civil society,

several donors and the United Nations expressed concern regarding the appointment process and eligibility of the new members. On 28 June, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights confirmed these concerns in a public statement. The Senior Officials Meeting on 3 July noted commitment by the Government of Afghanistan to maintain the integrity of the Commission and to ensure retention of the Commission's "A" status in the upcoming international accreditation process by the International Coordinating Committee of National Human Rights Institutions, which could also impact future international financial support to the Commission and more broadly.

28. Released on 31 July, the UNAMA Mid-Year Report 2013 on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict documented 3,852 civilian casualties (1,319 deaths and 2,533 injuries). That marked a 14 per cent rise in civilian deaths and a 28 per cent increase in civilian injuries compared to the first six months of 2012, with civilian casualties up 23 per cent overall. In the first half of 2013, civilian casualties were on a par with those of 2011, reversing the decline recorded in 2012. Of civilian deaths and injuries, 74 per cent were attributed to anti-Government elements, 9 per cent to pro-Government forces, and 12 per cent to ground engagements between the parties. Improvised explosive devices used by anti-Government elements continued to be the leading cause of civilian deaths and injuries. Increased ground engagements, now the second major cause of casualties, are increasing the threat to civilians. Women accounted for 106 of those killed and 247 of those injured, up 61 per cent compared to the first half of 2012. Children comprised 231 of the dead and 529 of the injured, a 30 per cent increase. A statement on the Taliban's official website dismissed the findings as biased and reiterated its stance that civilian Government employees and those perceived to support the Government were legitimate targets, in continuing, direct violation of international humanitarian law.

29. Accidents caused by explosive remnants of war in areas vacated by international forces represent a rising trend in deaths and injuries attributed to pro-Government forces. That resulted in 29 deaths and 37 injuries in the reporting period, in many cases the result of children searching for scrap metal. The United Nations has engaged with ISAF, which is working with its contributors in reviewing procedures.

30. The Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting on Children and Armed Conflict, led by the United Nations, documented 78 deaths and a further 195 injuries of children in 58 verified incidents between 1 May and 31 July. When discussing Afghanistan's progress on the Action Plan on Underage Recruitment, the Government highlighted progress in army and police recruitment practices and areas for improvement. The United Nations welcomed progress to date but emphasized the need for continued efforts in preventing the recruitment and use of children in Afghan security forces, particularly the police and the Afghan Local Police. On 10 August, the Office of my Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) undertook a joint mission to Kabul to support the Government's facilitation of the implementation of the Action Plan, including the development of a road map to compliance. On 14 August, the Inter-Ministerial Steering Committee met, with the United Nations in attendance, to discuss the road map and emphasized the great importance it placed on implementation of the Action Plan and removal from my list of parties that recruit or use children.

31. In monitoring implementation of Presidential Decree No. 129 on preventing abuse of conflict-related detainees, UNAMA visited 55 detention facilities in 19 provinces. Interviews were conducted with 144 adults, and 26 children were arrested on conflict-related charges. Credible and reliable incidents of torture and ill-treatment were found in five National Directorate of Security and six Afghan National Police detention facilities. On 10 July, UNAMA conducted its first visit to the detention facility in Parwan, which was transferred to Government of Afghanistan control in March, with 2,440 detainees currently being held. The facility's director advised that 2,330 detainees had been released since the handover, following case reviews. Another 70 detainees remain under the control of United States forces.

32. On 10 July, the Government submitted Afghanistan's first progress report on implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. On 28 July, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women responded, recognizing the progress in Afghanistan over the past decade. The continued low level of women's participation in major national decision-making processes was, however, noted, with only nine women belonging to the 70-member High Peace Council. Concern was expressed over the recent reduction in quotas for women in local elected bodies and lack of participation in the judiciary, including the Supreme Court.

33. In a troubling development in ensuring Constitutional commitments to gender equality, on 20 June the Wolesi Jirga passed a new Criminal Procedure Code which bars the questioning of relatives of the accused and stipulates that upon the withdrawal of a victim's complaint, the case is closed. This may disproportionately affect cases of domestic violence where witnesses are usually family members and there is great pressure on victims to rescind. The bill has been submitted to the Meshrano Jirga for consideration. On 2 July, the Court of Appeal overturned a sentence of 10 years' imprisonment for attempted murder against three relatives of a young woman severely tortured in 2010 in a case that had captured global attention. The perpetrators were instead sentenced to three months in jail for bodily harm and, having already served more than a year, were immediately released. This decision is the subject of an appeal to the Supreme Court. Meanwhile, UNAMA monitoring reveals that the number of women and girls prosecuted for moral crimes has risen despite the Supreme Court and the Office of the Attorney General having issued three directives stating that running away from home is not a crime. It appears that criminalization of the act still occurs, or that prosecutors use charges of attempted adultery instead, with 450 women and girls imprisoned in 2012 and 600 so far in 2013.

34. UNAMA and the United Nations system in Afghanistan have worked to increase awareness of the Security Council resolutions on women, peace and security. Civil society workshops were organized in Mazar-e Sharif, Herat, two in Nangarhar, Bamyan and Kabul.

IV. Implementation of the Kabul process and coordination of development assistance

35. On 29 June, the Government's national priority programme "Law and Justice for All" was endorsed, meaning that 21 of 22 programmes are now agreed. Given recent large-scale insurgent attacks on judicial institutions, the programme recognizes that the security of judges and prosecutors will require reinforcement.

36. The Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework Senior Officials' Meeting in Kabul on 3 July was co-chaired by the Ministers of Finance and for Foreign Affairs and my Special Representative. It was attended by delegations from 40 countries and eight international organizations, together with Afghan senior officials and civil society representatives. Plenary sessions discussed elections and aid-effectiveness, while working groups focused on human rights; rule of law and governance; and integrity in public finance, subnational governance and sustained and inclusive growth. It was noted that both the Government and the international community had made progress in meeting their commitments, but that greater efforts were needed on outstanding issues. The Minister of Finance reiterated the need for the international community to recognize Afghan ownership and leadership through a focus on institution-building and cost-effectiveness.

37. There was also discussion on economic growth and infrastructure development, highlighting achievements in public finance management and regional cooperation. Revenue growth over the past decade was welcomed as a significant achievement. The World Bank presented an economic forecast that estimated Afghanistan's real gross domestic product growth as 11.8 per cent in 2012/13, up from 7.3 per cent in 2011/12. This was, however, expected to slow in 2013/14 and fall to an average of 4.8 per cent annually over the next five years, with the overall economic scenario remaining challenging. Exports have declined against rising imports, leading to widening trade deficits. Revenue generation dropped by 19.6 per cent in the first quarter of 2013, although measures by the Government have slowed it to 3.9 per cent in the second quarter. The Government's ability to manage public finance was reported to have improved, with budget execution at 50 per cent compared to 39 per cent in 2010/11, but further progress would be required to sustain donor funding.

38. To ensure ongoing momentum, mechanisms of high-level dialogue between the Government and the international community that were established in the lead-up to the Senior Officials Meeting will continue. The strategic Steering Committee and working-level Technical Committee have been augmented by monthly Ministerial and ambassadorial-level meetings of the five plus three (the five major donors together with three rotating members) and weekly heads of donor agency gatherings. Three technical groups — on planning, national priority programme implementation, and elimination of violence against women and human rights — will also support further progress. The Government has also continued to engage donor partners in the implementation of its Aid Management Policy, including on-budget financing, development framework agreements, financing agreements, and joint analysis, research and assessments. The discussion is seeking to promote joint understanding on an aid-effectiveness agenda and consensus on definitions of "on budget" and "alignment".

39. On 7 July, the Independent Directorate of Local Governance, together with the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, finalized policy and terms of reference for the establishment of District Coordination Councils. These are intended to be in place until such time as constitutionally-mandated District Council elections take place. Provincial committees would determine membership based on Government criteria. The proposal has been submitted to the Council of Ministers for approval, with UNAMA facilitating consultations between the Government and the international community on funding modalities.

40. On 8 July, the United Nations launched the Afghanistan Integrity Initiative to support the Government in meeting anti-corruption priorities. It aims to provide an analytical foundation for a whole-of-Government approach, including simplifying administrative processes and ensuring that systems report and redress maladministration, misconduct and corruption. The Government's Transparency and Accountability national priority programme remains the only one yet to be endorsed. The Standing Committee of the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board noted progress on two of the four donor redlines, namely, ratification of the access to information law and streamlining of building permits in the Kabul Municipality, while verification of public officials' assets and the financial audit regime lagged.

V. Humanitarian assistance

41. The legal authorization of nearly 1.6 million Afghan refugees to remain in Pakistan was due to expire on 30 June. On 28 June, following an extraordinary consultation meeting in Kabul between the Governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan and the United Nations, the Government of Pakistan extended the proof of registration cards for refugees and the Tripartite Agreement on Voluntary Repatriation until 31 December 2015. That allows more time to create conducive conditions — through the Regional Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees — for the sustainable reintegration of Afghan refugee returnees, key to enhancing voluntary repatriation and reducing the potential for secondary displacement or return to the host country. At the meeting, the Government of Pakistan presented its new national policy on Afghan refugees, based on the approach of the Solutions Strategy. In implementing the agreed pillars — voluntary repatriation, sustainable reintegration in Afghanistan and support for refugee-hosting communities — the new policy stresses the need for political and diplomatic strategies, promotion of technical education and livelihood skills, a public information media campaign, and new bodies at federal and provincial level. All of this requires continuous international support. A total of 26,000 refugees voluntarily returned to Afghanistan between 1 January and 30 June from both Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran, a 35 per cent decrease over 2012.

42. Increased ground engagements in Afghanistan have resulted in growing short-term displacements in rural areas, notably in Badakhshan, Faryab and Ghor Provinces, many of which remain inaccessible to humanitarian actors. As at 31 July, 584,000 persons (91,000 families) have been internally displaced owing to conflict in the country, 64,000 of them in 2013.

43. As at 15 August, 3 cases of wild polio virus were reported, compared to 15 in the same period in 2012. All three were in the eastern region with deteriorating accessibility and continuing virus circulation in the bordering districts of Pakistan. The southern region, which had never previously succeeded in interrupting virus transmission, has not reported any cases since November 2012. The number of children missed by the vaccination campaign owing to inaccessibility in the south has been reduced by almost 30 per cent, with an increasing acceptance among all parties of the value of polio vaccination. A statement purportedly by Mullah Mohammad Omar published on the official Taliban website to mark the occasion of Eid al-Fitr allowed organizations working impartially in the health, refugee or food distribution sectors in areas under Taliban control to carry out "selfless activities" subject to compliance with conditions.

44. The mine action sector, supported by the United Nations, cleared 306 minefields in 137 communities in the reporting period. On 3 July, the Governor of Badakhshan and the United Nations hosted an event where 10 districts were declared completely free of mines and explosive remnants of war. It is estimated that 4,730 minefields affecting 1,655 communities across 33 provinces remain. The first six months' work on a 10-year plan to clear all hazards by March 2023 has proceeded on target. Estimated to cost $618 million, by the end of July $66 million had been committed.

45. On 3 August, the first of a number of flash floods hit the centre and south-east of the country. As at 15 August, it was estimated that 65 persons had been killed and 53 injured, while others remained missing. Overall, 759 families were affected, 550 of them in Kabul Province. Meanwhile, drought conditions in Ghor and Daikundi Provinces are expected to result in the failure of much of the harvest. A United Nations assessment in July recommended the provision of food aid, seeds and fodder. Initial estimates foresee that, from the month of October, up to 135,000 persons may require support.

VI. Counter-narcotics

46. On 26 June, the *World Drug Report 2013* was launched. It highlighted that Afghanistan had accounted for 74 per cent of the world's illicit opium production in 2012. The global area under poppy cultivation rose by 15 per cent in 2012, driven largely by increases in Afghanistan. Global production, however, fell by almost 30 per cent, mainly as a result of poor yields in Afghanistan owing to adverse weather conditions. The report further assessed that nearly 1 million Afghans were affected by drug use — one of the world's highest levels of addiction — with only 10 per cent receiving any form of treatment.

47. An early assessment for 2013 estimated an increase in opium cultivation in 12 provinces. Governor-led eradication activities in the reporting period aimed to reduce production figures. As at 13 July, up to 8,262 hectares of opium poppy were estimated to have been eradicated. In undertaking this effort, 132 lives have been lost and 89 persons injured.

48. Between 30 June and 3 July, a regional training on anti-money-laundering, illegal financial flows and suspect cash transactions was held in Tehran and brought together senior experts from Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. On 3 July, the Islamic Republic of Iran hosted the Seventh Regional Financial Intelligence Unit meeting to enhance regional cooperation in tackling money-laundering and suspicious financial transactions. The aim is to facilitate a common instrument to improve information exchange of suspicious transactions, including to tackle the profits of drug trafficking.

49. Efforts continued under the United Nations-led Regional Programme for Afghanistan and Neighbouring Countries, with the Second Regional Workshop on Drug Collection and Analysis Capacities held in Islamabad from 1 to 4 July. Participants from the eight Regional Programme countries as well as Sri Lanka, Maldives, Nepal and Bangladesh shared information on drug use and experiences with drug-use surveys. The first task force meeting of the Subprogramme on Trends and Impacts of the Regional Programme took place at the end of the Workshop. This

highlighted that the cultural sensitivities and stigma attached to drug use are a major challenge to interview-based surveys in the region. On 27 and 28 August, the fourth meeting of the Regional Intelligence Working Group on Precursor Control was held in Tehran, bringing together law enforcement officers working on precursor control and interdiction from West and Central Asia. Participants shared information on the status of precursor control, including the latest seizures of controlled substances.

50. Under the Triangular Initiative, a series of meetings were held in Kabul between 19 and 21 August with senior officials of Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan working to deepen counter-narcotics cooperation. Joint operations, border liaison offices, communications and the exchange of information were discussed.

VII. Mission support

51. After the 18.7 per cent reduction in funding for UNAMA in 2013, there is a need to avoid further large-scale organizational change in 2014 that would impact further UNAMA field presence and activities. Increased efficiencies have been achieved through focus on multitasking, reprofiling of posts and outsourcing. The UNAMA regional jet, which provided regular flights between Kabul and Dubai, was decommissioned.

52. Reducing its footprint as the transition process proceeds and in the light of budget constraints and security issues, UNAMA will close the Khost Provincial Office in October. It is also proposed that the UNAMA Bamyan Regional Office be reprofiled as a multi-agency office by the beginning of 2014, focusing engagement in this largely peaceful province increasingly on development issues. Pending budget approval, as of January 2014, there will be 13 field offices, down from a total of 23 in 2012. In Kunduz, no premises have yet been found for the office, which must be relocated or closed for security reasons. UNAMA has developed memorandums of understanding with the United Nations Development Programme in Mazar-e Sharif, Kandahar and Gardez on cost-sharing and additional reductions of operational costs in terms of security, ancillary staff and rental payments.

53. The Kuwait Joint Support Office continued to integrate support for UNAMA and the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). The Under-Secretary-General for Field Support, Ameerah Haq, visited the Office in July and witnessed the implementation of the Global Field Support Strategy in such inter-mission cooperation initiatives. The Office has commenced a staffing review to analyse the efficiencies associated with transferring human resources and finance functions to Kuwait.

VIII. Observations

54. The visit of my Deputy underlined the long-term commitment of the United Nations to assisting Afghan authorities and people to realize their aspirations of peace, justice and development. The dominant theme my Deputy heard was the need to protect the gains of the past decade. The significance of the upcoming elections and the need for reconciliation to ensure the success of transition and the country's long-term prospects were clear. He heard widespread calls for the United Nations

role in support of these Afghan-led political processes. The need for long-term predictability in international assistance as part of mutual commitments made at the Chicago Summit and in Tokyo was also underscored.

55. Effective, representative institutions are the foundation of stable transition processes. The 2014 Presidential elections, and the extent to which they are conducted inclusively, will be the surest basis of internal legitimacy. They will mark the first peaceful, democratic transfer of power in Afghanistan and will be central to ongoing international commitment. I welcome the adoption of electoral legislation. A sound legal framework confirming the independence of the Independent Election Commission and the Independent Electoral Complaints Commission represents the foundation for a robust electoral architecture and mutually agreed rules by which the forthcoming vote can be contested. The new commissioners have a great responsibility in their country's future. Operational, including security, planning is further advanced than during previous elections, and I welcome the clear Afghan lead showing that Afghanistan — its people, institutions, political and social forces — is indeed responsible for the 2014-2015 electoral cycle. Final agreement on funding modalities is now essential to ensure that resource mobilization proceeds smoothly.

56. I have taken note of the legitimate concerns raised by the Afghan authorities and society, as well as the international community, regarding the manner in which the Taliban office in Doha was opened. Any talks should be inclusive and should be accompanied by early confidence-building steps aimed at reducing levels of violence, notably around the elections and the increased safety and security of Afghan civilians who have suffered the effects of the conflict for too long. The forthcoming Presidential elections and current discussion among Afghan stakeholders on building a national consensus are likely to clarify candidates' positions, including on the peace process and on how to achieve reconciliation without compromising the gains of the past 12 years. The United Nations supports an inclusive Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process and I would encourage all efforts that ensure it starts soon.

57. The Senior Officials Meeting was an important opportunity to review progress under the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework and to confirm the need for active high-level engagement in accelerating efforts to meet commitments. Ensuring international commitments to the provision of assistance in ways that use and reinforce Afghan institutions and budgetary systems is a crucial element of transition. Confidence in the capabilities of Afghan governance and financial management systems is, in turn, essential. Increased internal revenue generation and the passage of the anti-money-laundering law are important in this regard. As Afghanistan's transition progresses, donors will continue to stress the importance of sustaining progress on human rights, including women's rights, to ensure the best developmental results for the Afghan people, as well as to maintain the commitment of donors' domestic constituents. Greater progress on implementation of the Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women will continue to be a clear priority, as will efforts to ensure retention of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission's "A" status in the upcoming international accreditation process.

58. The launch of the fifth and final stage of the security transition during the current quarter, with Afghan security forces to be in the lead across the country, confirmed the resolve of ISAF to end its operations next year. Afghan security forces have demonstrated increased capabilities and determination in assuming their

security responsibilities, while gaps and deficiencies are exposed with increased clarity. Security remains problematic in a number of mostly rural areas, including in the north of the country. A rise in civilian casualties — bringing deaths and injuries back to the highest levels documented post-2001 — is of concern. Insurgents continue to target civilian Government officials and civil servants. I call on all parties to respect civilians and to meet international obligations.

59. Disturbances and conflict are not all attributable to the Taliban, Al-Qaida-affiliated transnational terrorist groups, and other anti-Government armed groups. At such times of volatility and unpredictability, organized criminal groups involved in narcotics trafficking and a proliferation of illegal armed groups seek to assert influence. It is also for this reason that the successful transfer of political authority through Presidential elections as well as continuity and predictability in long-term international support for Afghanistan are critical to ensuring that there will be no impression of a security or governance vacuum.

60. I was heartened by the productive discussions of President Karzai with Prime Minister Sharif in Islamabad. The extension of the visit by one day demonstrated the very welcome readiness of both sides to work together on issues of common interest. This corresponds with the conclusions of my own visit to Pakistan, with the new Prime Minister's emphasis on improving neighbourly relations. The recent extension allowing Afghan refugees to stay in Pakistan amid continuing efforts to ensure sustainable solutions for returnees is highly appreciated. Constructive engagement by regional countries and cooperation between them is essential to building and reinforcing long-term stability. The Istanbul Process, in which Afghanistan plays a key role, is an important component of this. We encourage all lead countries on confidence-building measures to ensure that practical activities are under way by the end of 2013. I welcome China's offer to host the Ministerial meeting of the Istanbul Process next summer as recognition of the importance of regional solutions.

61. The United Nations partnership with a sovereign Afghanistan will continue to evolve in support of Afghan priorities and Afghan needs. As Afghan institutions assume a stronger lead, I recognize that the United Nations role must increasingly turn from service delivery to strengthening Afghan capacity and resilience and a support role to Afghan-led processes. I welcome strengthened coordination between the Government and the United Nations agencies, funds and programmes in advancing a "One United Nations" agenda. This will better align our activities with national priorities, including through efforts to reduce programmatic and financial transaction costs, to address the "second civil service", and to work in ways that do not risk the United Nations being seen as competing with Government for service delivery and international funds.

62. The 2013 Common Humanitarian Action Plan is currently around 63 per cent funded, a positive reverse on recent years that have seen a decline in humanitarian funding. I welcome the recommendations of the Humanitarian Coordinator to establish a Common Humanitarian Fund, which — in addition to generating new funding — will channel more resources to underfunded humanitarian actors, including Afghan non-governmental organizations that serve as the mainstay of response in the country. Increased displacement owing to conflict, especially in remote areas, is of concern. Efforts must be made to put in place mechanisms to

ensure that those displaced can find safe havens and access humanitarian assistance. I call on all parties to work to increase access in areas of ongoing conflict.

63. I would like to express my gratitude to all national and international staff members of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and to my Special Representative, Ján Kubiš, for their continued dedication, often under challenging conditions, to fulfilling our commitments in support of the people of Afghanistan.